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The Repentant Abelard

Hellemans, Babette

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tual context formed by various literary genres like historical chronicles and biblical paraphrases (Wollin, Bampi), but also in a historical (Bergqvist, Péneau) and art historical (Bengtsson) context. The book is an example of how combining interdisciplinary approaches is valuable for a holistic understanding of any cultural expression.

All in all, the anthology is wonderfully rich with regards to topics and approaches, and an interesting and stimulating read for scholars of many disciplines. The short articles may be seen as individual samples of the numerous aspects of the texts that deserve further attention. When read in relation to each other, the articles retell a narrative of the aesthetic, cultural, and political value of the *Eufemiavisor*, and thus function as great inspiration for future research.

STEFKA G. ERIKSEN, Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research

JUANITA FEROS RUYS, *The Repentant Abelard: Family, Gender, and Ethics in Peter Abelard's "Carmen ad Astralabium" and "Planctus"*. (The New Middle Ages.) New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. Pp. xvi, 355. \$105. ISBN: 978-0-312-24002-8.
doi:10.1086/702906

History shows that it is rare to produce something truly new. Yet we can safely state that nothing like these two texts under review—a song and a lament—had ever been written before Peter Abelard. We have the ancient tradition of *carmina* and *planctus*, certainly, referring to a common background in the tradition of poetry writing. But this tradition was rooted in pagan culture and dealt with personal themes, norms, and views on society at large, while Peter Abelard's writings reveal something entirely different. He composed, within a fixed formal frame, two pieces of art that each possess a monumentality meant to justify monasticism with its interest in the afterlife. At the same time, the texts show very personal details about loss and grief. Juanita Feros Ruys has made the first attempt to bring the two texts together in a new Latin edition and a full English translation, adding an in-depth commentary and comprehensive notes.

Feros Ruys describes Abelard and Heloise as a couple in constant motion, struggling to give meaning to their role as parents and consequently to the idea of family. In doing so, she links the *Carmen* and the *Planctus* to a hitherto neglected aspect of Abelard's personality: the fact that he was also a father and a husband. Feros Ruys claims that the two poems, which she dates to the early to mid-1130s, are part of a set of texts written by Abelard when his negotiations with Heloise about the need to adopt the monastic vow were put to rest. As we know from the *Historia calamitatum*, the first letters, and some other historical sources, their son Astralabe was born out of wedlock, a scandal that would become the main reason for his parents' separation. We also know that, due to Abelard and Heloise's situation, Astralabe lived a life quite independent from his parents. It is likely that he joined a monastic order (possibly the Cistercians, as some have suggested), since he reappears in a letter from Heloise to Peter the Venerable, just after Abelard's death. We do know, however, and here lies Feros Ruys's strongest point, that after Heloise's "silence"—that is, when she became abbess of the Paraclete, which was a turning point in their relationship—Abelard started to write new material for her. The *Planctus* would fit very well in these so-called "Paraclete writings."

Around the same time Abelard might have felt that his son Astralabe, then an adolescent, might be in need of some paternal advice about how to live a life in which the inner and the outer self are balanced. Even if the didactic *Carmen* is quite traditional in form and style, the message is typically Abelardian in the sense that the emphasis is placed on the providential disposition of creation and the importance of receiving God's grace. See, for example, this phrase: "Although some say that everything happens by chance, yet it is agreed that God

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has arranged all things" (845–46). For a child with such a difficult start, victim of scandal and mistrust, naming is important and trust in God's intentions even more so. Indeed, by giving a child the name of Astralabe, referring to a device to measure the position of the sun, the moon, and the stars, Abelard and Heloise transmitted a highly suggestive message, to say the least. The choice of names in Abelard's life and works is a debated theme in scholarship. We do not exactly know, for instance, who invented the name of the Paraclete ("comforter") for the monastery, but in any case, it is equally without any precedent. Feros Ruys therefore rightly places the *Carmen* and the *Planctus* in the context of parents sharing a child; in short, a couple in search of an identity by which any understanding of "family" is shattered right from the start. Indeed, both the naming and the content of the two texts—if we consider the Paraclete writings as "oeuvre," which I believe we should—reveal an immense suffering. The importance of Feros Ruys's contribution is that she sees both texts in the light of a psychological interpretation of mourning: the story of a man who sinned, and whose lover and child had to be taken away from him, following societal rules of obedience, as they both were placed under the aegis of monastic eternal bliss. In the same vein, following Christian norms of the time, Feros Ruys suggests the possibility of salvation through penance—hence the title of her book, *The Repentant Abelard*, by which she adds another dimension to this famous figure of the Middle Ages. The picture is also a tough one. To make things less tough, perhaps, the move toward a poetic enterprise, by which Feros Ruys means the *Carmen* and the *Planctus*, suggests that, at last, Abelard truly heard Heloise's maternal anguish (67).

Feros Ruys explains in her analysis of the *Planctus* how "Abelard was doing something new in choosing to write laments in the voices of the Old Testament characters. . . . [H]e views the *planctus* as a genre that belongs to this temporal world and one that is particularly associated with women" (62). The emphasis on the Old Testament is a bit of a mystery. Some scholars have suggested that it was probably a means of expressing the present state of humankind. Feros Ruys argues, however, that Abelard fashioned "*planctus* as a mode most appropriate to female mourners" (63). On a more banal level the poems also reveal how Abelard himself found comfort in the process of composing a new text (see *Planctus David super Saul et Ionatha*, 63–68):

I give rest to my lyre:
I would wish also my laments,
and, were it possible, to my tears.

With hands wounded from strumming,
with voice hoarse from plaining,
my spirit also fails.

[Do quietem fidibus; / uellem ut et planctibus, / sic possem, et fletibus. // Lesis pulsu manibus, / raucis planctu uocibus, / deficit et spiritus.]

The *planctus* show how the present can only be a time of sorrow and Abelard makes this feeling of "presentness" palpable by his "persistent use of present tense by the speaking voices in most of the laments, even when they describe events in the past" (64). These voices can only give comfort if they are mirrored to a promised time, when the spirit of God has descended. And here we see something of Abelard the theologian, because in terms of the human condition, to which his life with Heloise and their son belongs, a merely pointing to the afterlife is not sufficient.

This important book shows how questioning the meaning of family might lead to a new understanding of human connections between men and women, brothers and sisters, or parents and children, about what bound them and how they dealt with loss, transforming grief into songs that reflected somehow the utterly ordinariness of being human. With grace

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being so vital for Abelard's oeuvre, from the *Carmen* and the *Planctus* an essentially soteriological dimension of "the family" emerges, humanistic in proportions and seeking new ways of life.

BABETTE HELLEMANS, University of Groningen

THOMAS A. FUDGE, *Jan Hus Between Time and Eternity: Reconsidering a Medieval Heretic*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016. Pp. xx, 275. \$95. ISBN: 978-1-4985-2750-7. doi:10.1086/702829

This book presents not a single overarching argument but a series of "portraits" (xv) of the career and memory of Jan Hus, most of them originally prepared as talks presented in the lead-up to the sixcentenary of Hus's execution at Constance in 1415.

The first chapter, "Did Hus' 'Spirituality' Influence Women and Religious Practice in Bohemia?," addresses Hus's views on and participation in female spirituality and religious practice in fifteenth-century Bohemia. Chapter 2, "The Sex Life of Jan Hus," surveys Hus's thinking on sex and sexuality. The third chapter, "The Eschatological Hus in an Apocalyptic Age," situates Hus's apocalypticism within that of previous and subsequent Bohemian reformists, and shows how Hus himself was later incorporated into apocalyptic schemes.

Chapter 4, "Hus on Trial: Seeing the Accused through the Eyes of His Enemies," suggests that we look not just to the trial of Hus as Hus's sympathizers, but also to the perspectives of those who were involved in his prosecution or represented Hus as defendant. The fifth chapter, "Preaching against Heretics at the Council of Constance," studies two *sermones synodalis* at Constance, delivered before the executions of Hus and Jerome of Prague, situating them within the history of intolerance toward heresy. Chapter 6, "Friendship and Faith: The Prisoner and the Knight," turns to records on the life of the knight Jan Chlum to narrate a biography that pivots on his special friendship with Hus at Constance. In chapter 7, "'The Other Sheep': Reflections on Heresy by a Suspected Heretic," Fudge outlines Hus's own views on heresy and its prosecution.

Chapter 8, "A Curious Absence: Jan Hus in the Hussite Crusade," asks why so little attention was paid to Hus himself in the sources pertaining to the history of the Hussite Crusades. The ninth chapter, "Jan Hus in Genealogies of Heresy and Alternative Models of Apostolic Succession," presents an overview of Hussite views of apostolic succession and enumerates polemical representations of Hus in fictional successions of heretics. Chapter 10, "The Seven Last Words of Jan Hus," studies not only Hus's last words, but several statements he made between his condemnation and execution at Constance. This chapter is the odd one out—a commemoration of sorts, something that sits uneasily here, given the call to pull away from the "age-old need for saints and icons" in Hussite studies that the author voices in the epilogue (228).

Nonspecialists may find it difficult to determine if the author has presented the kind of revisionist positions that he so stridently asserts, let alone if he has argued convincingly for them. This reviewer, as a specialist, finds unconvincing chapter 5's reductive characterization of heresy and its prosecution in late medieval Europe, for example, and would contest the uncritical reading of Petr of Mladoňovice's unmistakably hagiographic *Relatio* of Hus's trial in chapter 10. Throughout the book, the scholarship the author cites is selective, including when he counters specific previous claims or prevailing views; interlocutors are seldom named explicitly in the main text; and with some exceptions, relevant and accessible scholarship in English apart from his own is largely absent. Crucial primary texts are most often summarized, with only occasional glimpses at their own language, even in translation. All of this limits the extent to which scholars will be able to rely on the book's arguments. To his

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